

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT & BOARD OF HEALTH

Fiscal Year 2009

The mission of the Amherst Board of Health, working through the Health Department, is to promote the health and wellbeing of our community. We fulfill this mission through our core functions: assessment, assurance, promotion and policy development.

**Assessment:** systematically collecting, assembling, analyzing, and making available information regarding the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, and epidemiological studies of health problems.

**Assurance:** ensuring that all Amherst residents have the services necessary to maintain or restore good health, either by coordinating the delivery of services by other agencies, by policy or regulation development, or by providing services directly.

**Promotion:** providing services and educational opportunities that encourage healthy environments and healthy lifestyles.

**Policy Development:** development and implementation of comprehensive public health policies, regulations and legislation.

The work of the Amherst Health Department is organized into six major areas: Access to Health Care, Infectious Disease Control, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Environmental Health, Health Policy and Emergency Planning and Preparedness.

### I. Access to Health Care

Ensuring access to health care for all Amherst residents continues to be a priority for the Department. Some of the Departmental programs to address these concerns are Hampshire Health Connect and “Peace in the Family: a Khmer Community Project.”

#### **Hampshire Health Connect**

Hampshire Health Connect (HHC) is a nonprofit organization created by a group of citizens, providers and representatives of local government, businesses, and the insurers. Its aim is to link families and individuals who are underinsured or who have no health insurance with insurance programs they may be eligible for, or to medical providers willing to see HHC patients at no charge or on a sliding fee scale. HHC is housed in Cooley Dickinson Hospital.

HHC provides the services of a Latina caseworker, who has been working out of the Amherst Health Department to enroll all Amherst residents, but especially those whose first language is Spanish, in the program. As a result of this, Amherst residents’ participation in HHC, and the number of Latino clients served by HHC, continues to rise. During FY 09, 32 Amherst residents were served. The enactment of Health Care Reform has had a great impact on the work of Hampshire Health Connect. Many who believed they were ineligible for state benefits are now seeking the help of HHC to enroll in the Commonwealth Care Programs.

### **Cambodian Health**

Lauren Srey, our Cambodian Outreach Worker, continues to work with Khmer Health Advocates and Jewish Family Services to provide medical, mental health and social services for Cambodians. She has also worked with many of the elders to help them become United States citizens.

Lauren Srey helps residents for a variety of reasons. Here are some of them:

- 23 Citizen Immigration Issues;
- 151 Cases of Medical Assistance;
- 20 Home Visits;
- 44 Employment Assistance Cases;
- 69 Housing Issues;
- 5 Court Issues; and
- Diabetes Education.

### **II. Infectious Disease Control**

Controlling the spread of communicable diseases and food-borne illnesses is an important function of the Health Department.

Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control during FY 09 included the following:

- 2 cases of active Tuberculosis;
- 3 cases of Tb prevention and control;
- One flu clinic, in conjunction with the Council on Aging, provided vaccines; for Flu, Pneumonia and Tetanus to 157 residents;
- Monthly immunization clinics provided 152 immunizations to adults and children; and
- 4 cases of Salmonella, 8 cases of Pertussis, 4 cases of Campylobacter, 2 cases of Giardiasis, 1 case Group B Strep, 4 cases of Hepatitis C, 18 cases of Influenza, 1 case of Malaria, 25 cases of Lyme Disease, 1 case of Viral Meningitis, 2 cases of Strep Pneumonia.

### **III. Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**

Programs aimed at promoting health and preventing disease are another important aspect of the Health Department's work. Programs and interventions are targeted to the general public, as well as specific groups at increased health risk due to their particular demographic group, or the consequences of their own behavior or the behavior of others.

#### **High Risk Groups**

- The Public Health Nurse and Inspectors work together as a team to address the multi-faceted problem of hoarding, via joint inspections including mental health assessments and referrals to social services.
- Town of Amherst Handicapped Permits are available to residents of Amherst who have a temporary or chronic condition that substantially limits their mobility. This permit allows residents to park in handicapped spaces within the Town of Amherst. This permit WILL NOT extend parking privileges beyond Town limits or the area colleges. A permit may be obtained from the Amherst Health Department. A doctor's certificate stating the condition and the expected duration of the disability is required.

### **Social Justice Grant**

The Amherst Health Department Social Justice Project seeks to initiate dialogue with varied segments of Amherst Town Government and the Amherst community to think together about behaviors, policies, and practices of town government that affect and/or contribute to differential and inequitable life outcomes and daily life experiences for people from different social identity groups that are manifested in differential health outcomes. Specifically, we want to explore root causes of health inequities, and to identify potential policies, procedures, and practices that will enable varied departments within Town government to act more effectively on root causes.

This project explores the social, economic, and environmental conditions that determine the health outcomes of various populations and examines the realities race, gender, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood, have on health.

- We completed the first phase of our internal dialogues with Town employees. Recommendations from those dialogues were made to the Town Manager and Department Heads in October 2008, and an Amherst Town Employee Social Justice Committee was formed and is comprised of thirteen members.
- The project identified several community groups within the Town to be a part of the projects Community Dialogue Sessions, which have begun.
- A public screening and discussion of Unnatural Causes, a documentary exploring the social determinants of health was held in May 2009.

### **IV. Environmental Issues**

The Board of Health is required by state statute to perform many pertinent duties relating to the protection of public health, disease control and to advocate sanitary living conditions. The Board of Health's Environmental Health Division staff consists of three inspectors: two full-time and one part-time. Their responsibility is to regulate the laws. This fiscal year, the department successfully conducted 942 inspections and issued 382 Town permits.

#### **Food Safety**

The Environmental Health Division inspected 272 food handlers during the 2009 fiscal year. We administer permits for all food handlers encompassing: restaurants, recreational camps, bed and breakfast operations, residential kitchens, college institutions, hotels, motels, retail food stores, schools, mobile food units, temporary events, caterers, bakeries, and frozen food establishments.

The Department's routine inspections and perseverance are crucial to protecting the public health's welfare. The division enforces Chapter X of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standard for Food Establishments, 105 CMR 590.000. These state laws allow the Town of Amherst to conduct inspections, issue orders and suspend or revoke permits where necessary.

The Environmental Health Division collaborates with local restaurants to be in compliance with the Federal Food Code. The code requires all restaurants to have a person in charge (PIC) who has knowledge of food-borne disease prevention and application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. We will continue to monitor food managers to ensure obtainment of their Food Manager Certification and to develop a food protection program.

### **Body Art Establishments**

There are three Body Art Establishments and 19 licensed practitioners in Amherst. Inspectors were able to conduct 7 inspections.

### **Swimming Pools**

No person shall operate or maintain any swimming, wading or special purpose pool without obtaining a permit from the Health Department. The permit shall be subject to the requirements of 105 CMR 435.00 and to any regulations as may be adopted by the Board of Health, provided, however, that said local board of health regulations shall not be applicable to a state owned or operated swimming, wading or special purpose pool. The Health Department issued 18 swimming pool permits, including 1 residential swimming pool.

### **Recreational Camps**

We continue to perform extensive monitoring and inspections to sustain quality and assurance of compliance. This fiscal year there were 17 recreational camps. The total number of inspections conducted for recreational camps is 72.

Camp operators can request CORIs and SORIs online. The turnaround time for such a request is estimated to be 4-5 business days. We recommended all camp operators to use the online feature. In fact, some camps that had fallen behind on criminal and sexual history requests were able to get results in time for their scheduled inspection.

Throughout the year we receive new information from the Community Sanitation Program. The Department makes every effort to forward the new material and information to all of our camp operators in a timely manner. Although the Environmental Health Division continues to distribute informational packets, these packets are now made available online.

### **Housing**

The Health Department upholds all nuisance and housing complaints. Chapter II of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standards of Fitness for Human Habitation, M.G.L. c.111, ss. 127A and 127B: 105 CMR 410.000, upon request or upon the Department's initiative the Health Department can certify violations, issue orders, hold hearings, grant variances and institute court proceedings if needed to enforce such orders. Inspectors conducted 100 inspections including fraternities, sororities and voucher program related issues this fiscal year.

M.G.L. c.111, s.122, allows the Health Department to investigate nuisances which in the Board's opinion may be injurious to the public health. The Health Department may destroy, prevent or remove such nuisances and make regulations relative. There were 69 nuisance complaints, mostly involving trash. All nuisance complaints were addressed and abated. The Health Department organized a Bed Bugs Seminar for the landlords of Amherst. Twenty landlords attended the informative event and reported finding the information helpful.

### **Septic System**

The Environmental Health Department enforces the State 310 CMR 15.000, Environmental Code, Title 5: Standard requirements for the siting, construction, inspection, upgrade, expansion of on-site sewage treatment, for the transport and disposal of septage. This fiscal year the Inspectors conducted 16 percolation tests and 16 septic system finals. Beginning in 2008, the Health Department requires a Title 5 witness fee to be paid to the Town of \$200. In FY 09, the Inspectors conducted 22 Title 5 inspections.

## **Septage and Garbage**

The Health Department enforces Title 5 of the State Environmental Code; Minimum Requirements for the Subsurface Disposal of Sewage, 310 CMR 15.00. We've issued 15 permits for the removal or transportation of garbage and offal this fiscal year.

## **V. Emergency Preparedness**

The Health Department continues to develop a volunteer medical provider pool through the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Program. There are currently 30 health care providers on the Amherst MRC roster. The Amherst MRC has held monthly training sessions since the fall of 2004. The group is trained in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), Emergency Dispensing Site (EDS) operations, Shelter Operations, and other public health emergency and disaster preparedness-related topics. Health Department staff are involved in several local preparedness organizations such as the Hampshire Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalition and Five College Public Safety Emergency Preparedness.

## **VI. Health Policy and Planning**

The Board of Health is responsible for setting policies and creating regulations to protect the health of Amherst residents. Board of Health members are: David Ahlfeld (Chair), Ellen Leahy-Pile, Nancy Gilbert, David Kaufman, MD, and Sandra Sulsky. Under Massachusetts General Laws (M.G.L.), as well as state and local regulations, Boards of Health have a broad range of responsibilities for making and enforcing policies that promote and protect the health of citizens. This fiscal year, the Board of Health adopted the *Amherst Board of Health Regulations for Private Wells*. These regulations are intended to protect the public's health by ensuring that private wells are constructed in a manner which will protect the quality of the groundwater derived from private wells. Also this year, the Board has worked on reviewing the current tobacco regulations and has approved amendments to both the *Town of Amherst Regulation Prohibiting Smoking in Workplaces and Public Places* and the *Regulations of the Amherst Board of Health Tobacco Sales Permits and Sale of Tobacco Products to Minors*.

## **FY 09 Board of Health**

David Ahlfeld, Chair

Ellen Leahy-Pile

Nancy Gilbert

David Kaufman, MD

Sandy Sulsky